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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT HALONEN
AND ADVISORS

Farewell Call on President Halonen...

[11.](#) (C) The Ambassador on Oct. 7 paid a farewell call on President Halonen. Halonen began her remarks by pointedly telling the Ambassador "I am a friend of America." She said that Finnish-American relations were strong, and that she looked forward to working together with the U.S. in the future on a broad range of shared goals. The Ambassador said that he was pleased Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Tuomioja would meet in early November. Halonen agreed and expressed hope for a successful meeting. Turning to hurricane Katrina, the Ambassador reiterated our appreciation for Finland's assistance. Halonen said that she empathized with President Bush and the problems he faced with the relief effort; she understood that most of the problems originated at the local level and likened it to problems with civil crisis management in the Nordic-Baltic region where local capabilities were still inadequate.

[12.](#) (C) Halonen then addressed Finnish press coverage of her conversation with President Bush on the margins of the NATO Istanbul Summit in 2004. (Note: Halonen straightened the President's tie during a group photo op, and a few Finnish journalists interpreted this as a sign of Halonen's 'desperation' for interaction with the President). Halonen said that the President had actually asked her to fix his tie, and that she had jokingly remarked that if she did so, it would spark a media row in Finland. As it turned out, the media here did indeed highlight this interaction. The Ambassador said that he was pleased also that Halonen met the President at the UNGA (and subsequently reiterated this during a television interview on Finland's major news network). Finland is an important country for the U.S.--small in size, but big in influence, and he was glad that relations were strong as he departed. Finally, the Ambassador expressed disappointment that former Finnish President Ahtisaari had not won the Nobel Peace Prize.

...and on her Advisors

[13.](#) (C) Ambassador Mack subsequently met with Halonen's Chief of Staff, Jarmo Viinanen, and foreign policy advisor Paivi Kairomo-Hella. The Ambassador raised the topic of Russia, saying that President Halonen had described Putin as someone Finland knew and could deal with since he had a "northern mentality." The Ambassador characterized this description as "the devil you know," and Halonen agreed. Viinanen responded that given Russia's importance to Finland, the GoF will have close relations with whomever is in power in Moscow. He said that during recent meetings between Putin and Halonen, the Russians raised concerns about their border with China, prompting Halonen to reply wryly that Finland understood how problematic long borders with big communist powers could be.

[14.](#) (C) Viinanen opined that Finland was, ironically, in better shape now regarding its border policy with Russia because of the postwar settlement after World War II. The treaty of mutual understanding with the Soviet Union had resolved outstanding border issues, albeit at great cost. On the other hand, the Baltic countries faced continued difficulties with Russia over unresolved border issues. On the China Arms Embargo, the Ambassador expressed U.S. concern that the issue might arise during Finland's 2006 EU Presidency. Viinanen replied that the embargo was a "badly written agreement" after Tienamen, and was "causing problems" for the EU now.

MACK